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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MANILA 004785

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [KPAO](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE REACTION TO LATEST REVELATIONS ABOUT
ALLEGED ACTIVITIES OF FBI EMPLOYEE

REF: A. MANILA 4466

[B](#). MANILA 4433

[C](#). MANILA 4417

[D](#). MANILA 1674

[1](#)1. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified; Please handle accordingly.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Philippine media is covering in an extensive fashion an October 5 report by ABC News that recently-arrested FBI analyst Leandro Aragoncillo may have stolen classified US documents from the office of the US Vice President and forwarded these materials to Opposition politicians in the Philippines. All media are repeating ABC's allegation that it is the first recorded instance of possible espionage within the White House. Philippine media stories on these latest developments are contained in para 5.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Political reaction to these allegations has been muted, so far. Presidential Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye has stated, "We consider it the business of the US government and we are not making any further comment." In October 6 remarks to the press, Opposition Senator Panifilo Lacson -- as he has before -- acknowledged receiving documents from Aragoncillo, but downplayed their significance, referring to their contents as "shallow information." Former Education Secretary Florencio Abad, who apparently also received

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information from Aragoncillo, said the documents "were really nothing new." Opposition Senator Aquilino Pimentel also acknowledged seeing such documents.

[1](#)4. (SBU) As we did in the initial set of stories about Aragoncillo when he was arrested in September (refs a-c), Mission has not responded and will not respond to inquiries about the ongoing US investigation. We have referred all questions to the US Department of Justice.

TEXT OF PHILIPPINE MEDIA REPORTS

[1](#)5. (U) Following is the full text of several major articles from the Philippine press:

BEGIN TEXT

"RP: No Comment on White House Spy" (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 10/07/05)

The Philippine government said Thursday that the arrest of a former US Marine and naturalized US citizen from the Philippines who allegedly stole documents from the White House was an internal US affair.

ABC News reported on Wednesday that the suspect, Leandro Aragoncillo, had allegedly used his top secret clearance at the White House to steal classified materials from Vice President Dick Cheney's office. Officials told ABC that among the classified documents allegedly stolen were damaging dossiers on Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, which were allegedly passed on to opposition politicians planning a coup in the Pacific nation.

"We consider it as the business of the US government and we are not making any further comment," Arroyo spokesperson Ignacio Bunye told reporters here.

Aragoncillo was arrested last month and accused of downloading more than 100 classified documents from computers of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), where he worked as an analyst after a nearly three-year stint at the White House. The FBI and CIA are calling it the first case of espionage at the White House in modern history, according to ABC. The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), the Philippines counterpart of the FBI, declined to comment on the ABC report.

NBI chief Reynaldo Wycoco had told reporters last month that

the FBI had sought the aid of his agency in tracking down the recipients of the stolen documents, which were allegedly passed through former Filipino police official Michael Ray Aquino.

Aquino fled to the United States after being indicted for murder here.

The US embassy declined to comment on the case. Aragoncillo's alleged spying is suspected of being part of opposition attempts to gain information to bring down the Arroyo government. Deposed Philippine president Joseph Estrada and two other Filipino opposition figures admitted last month receiving information from Aragoncillo. Estrada, who is under house arrest while facing corruption charges in the Philippines, said Aragoncillo visited him in detention and had passed on some documents on the Philippine political situation. The transfers apparently occurred between mid-2001 and 2003.

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"Palace, U.S. Mum on Espionage Case (Philippine Star, 10/07/05)

The government said yesterday that the arrest of Filipino-American FBI analyst Leandro Aragoncillo, who allegedly stole documents from the White House, was an internal US affair.

"We consider it the business of the US government and we are not making any further comment," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye told reporters. "It's up to them to do what is necessary. It's their own breach of security."

The US Embassy declined to comment on the case. "It's a legal and judicial matter," said Lee McCleeny, the embassy's counselor for public affairs.

The Department of Foreign Affairs also declined to comment, except to say that the government will provide assistance to former police officer Michael Ray Aquino, who was arrested along with Aragoncillo also on espionage charges.

"The DFA can't comment on the matter that is pending before a US court," said spokesman Gilberto Asuque. "We are reiterating that the Philippine consulate general in New York is ready to assist Mr. Aquino."

US broadcaster ABC News reported yesterday that Aragoncillo had allegedly used his top secret clearance at the White House to steal classified materials from US Vice President Dick Cheney's office.

Officials told ABC that among the classified documents allegedly stolen were damaging dossiers on President Arroyo, which were allegedly passed on to opposition politicians planning a coup here.

Aragoncillo was arrested last month and accused of downloading more than 100 classified documents from computers of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), where he worked as an analyst after a nearly three-year stint at the White House.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), the Philippines' counterpart to the FBI, declined to comment on the report.

NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco told reporters last month that the FBI had sought the aid of his agency in tracking down the recipients of the stolen documents, which were allegedly passed through Aquino, who now lives in New York.

Aquino fled to the United States after being indicted for murder here.

Aragoncillo's alleged spying is suspected of being part of opposition attempts to gain information to bring down the Arroyo administration.

Deposed President Joseph Estrada and two other Filipino opposition figures admitted last month to receiving information from Aragoncillo.

Estrada, who is under house arrest while facing corruption charges in the Philippines, said Aragoncillo visited him in detention and had passed on some documents on the Philippine political situation. The transfers apparently occurred between mid-2001 and 2003.

Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said his office wrote to the FBI to ask for copies of documents that would emerge in the investigation, but that the US government has not responded.

"A crime has been committed in the United States," he told The Associated Press. "Two Filipinos are involved and we don't know what classified documents they got, so we want to know because it might affect the national security situation in this country."

He said bits of information that can be gleaned from the charge sheet against Aragoncillo show there could be some information used to destabilize the government. He did not elaborate.

Gonzalez said he was on the phone yesterday with Philippine Ambassador to Washington Albert del Rosario, who told him that the Philippine Embassy was keeping tabs on the Aragoncillo case.

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"Fil-Am Tagged in White House Espionage Case" (Philippine Star, 10/07/05)

WASHINGTON - In what is believed to be the first espionage case involving the White House in recent years, a Filipino-American linked to the political opposition in the Philippines allegedly used his top secret clearance to steal classified information from Vice President Dick Cheney's office, US broadcaster ABC News reported yesterday.

ABC said Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) analyst Leandro Aragoncillo, 46, worked undetected at the White House for almost three years before leaving to take a job with the agency. He was arrested last month and accused of downloading more than 100 classified documents from FBI computer databases.

Aragoncillo is a naturalized US citizen who was born in the Philippines.

Officials told ABC the classified material which the former 21-year US Marine veteran stole included damaging dossiers on President Arroyo. They were allegedly passed on to Filipino opposition politicians planning a coup in the Philippines.

The FBI and CIA are calling it the first case of espionage at the White House in modern history, according to ABC.

White House officials would not comment on the case and referred reporters to the FBI, but confirmed an investigation had been launched. "It is an ongoing investigation and as such all questions should be directed to the FBI," White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan said. "We are cooperating fully with the investigation." "No comment, all questions have to be addressed to the FBI, it's a pending investigation and the White House will do its best to cooperate," said deputy White House spokesman Trent Duffy.

Justice Department spokesman Brian Roehrkasse said the department would not comment on an ongoing investigation, first reported Wednesday evening by ABC. A law enforcement official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the case, said investigators were examining all of Aragoncillo's postings where he had access to classified information, including the White House. Officials are trying to figure out how Aragoncillo got his job at the White House in 1999, and when he started spying, ABC said. The former Marine worked on the staff of then vice president Al Gore in 2000 and told friends he also worked with former US President Bill Clinton and with Condoleezza Rice when she was national security adviser, the network said.

"Even though it's not for the Russians or some other government, the fact that it occurred at the White House is a matter of great concern," John Martin, the government's lead espionage prosecutor for 26 years, was quoted as saying. "Of course, it is a source of embarrassment when you find out that this kind of activity has been carried out literally right under your nose," Martin said.

Aragoncillo's alleged spying is suspected of being part of opposition attempts to gain information to bring down the Arroyo administration.

In July 2004, Aragoncillo began working as an FBI intelligence analyst at its Fort Monmouth Information Technology Center in New Jersey and began sending classified information and documents in January, according to an FBI criminal complaint released by the US Justice Department in September. The documents' contents have not been made public.

From May to Aug. 15 of this year, he printed or downloaded 101 classified documents relating to the Philippines, of which 37 were classified "secret," according to the criminal complaint. Aragoncillo allegedly used personal email accounts to send the files to individuals in the Philippines, including former and current public officials, from January to September 2005. He sent some of the material to Michael Ray Aquino, a former senior superintendent of the Philippine National Police who lives in New York City, the complaint said. Both men were arrested Sept. 10 at their homes and ordered held without bail following an appearance before a federal magistrate. Aragoncillo "essentially admitted that he took classified information," Assistant US Attorney Karl H. Buch told the magistrate.

Since his arrest, Aragoncillo has been cooperating with police, according to ABC. "He has admitted to spying while working on the staff of Vice President Cheney's office," the network said.

Aquino, arrested in March for overstaying a tourist visa, was charged alongside Aragoncillo with "acting as unregistered agents of a foreign official and passing classified information to that official and others in the Republic of the Philippines."

Deposed Philippine President Joseph Estrada admitted last month to receiving information from Aragoncillo. Estrada, who is under house arrest while facing corruption charges in the Philippines, said Aragoncillo visited him in detention and had passed on some documents on the Philippine political situation. The transfers apparently occurred between mid-2001 and 2003.

Aquino is a known protg of opposition leader Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who has been active in opposition efforts to oust Mrs. Arroyo. Both Estrada and Lacson have been actively calling for the ouster of Mrs. Arroyo, who has been embroiled in her own political scandal stemming from opposition allegations that she cheated to win the May 2004 elections. Lacson, a former national police chief under whom Aquino served, said he and "many others" received information passed along by Aquino, but he played down the value of the reports, describing them as "shallow information."

Last month, Newark US Attorney Christopher J. Christie said there was no evidence that the Arroyo administration was involved, but he would not say if the suspects were in contact with opposition factions.

The Philippines has been beset by persistent coup rumors since Mrs. Arroyo was accused of rigging last year's elections.

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